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Harding, S.; Radford, M.

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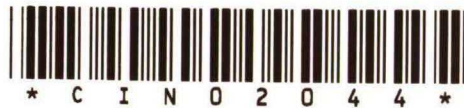
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PAPER

**Work Values in Cross-National Perspective
Some Observations from Applied Research**

Stephen Harding and Mark Radford

WORC PAPER 94.11.044/6

**Paper prepared for the Symposium 'Values and Work'
WORC, Tilburg University, The Netherlands**

November 9-12, 1994

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Work Values in Cross-National Perspective Some Observations from Applied Research

**Stephen Harding and Mark Radford
ISR International Survey Research**

WORC, Tilburg University, The Netherlands

Introduction

The data we intend to present in this paper consists of a selection of research findings from our work as consultants for ISR International Survey Research. ISR is a consultancy specialising in the field of employee opinion research. Founded some 20 years ago by ex- researchers from the University of Chicago, ISR has concentrated on conducting broad-based employee opinion surveys for medium to large scale organisations. The total number of companies surveyed exceeds 1,000 in more than 50 countries. The organisations in the database are often multinational, with relatively progressive human resources policies. As it is pertinent to the research, some examples of these companies are listed here, for information:

TABLE I



PARTIAL EUROPEAN CLIENT LIST

American Express	General Electric	Otis Elevator
Amoco	General Motors	Peugeot Talbot
AT&T	Gillette	Perkins Engines
Avon	Grand Metropolitan	Philip Morris
Bank of Ireland	Hewlett-Packard	Philips
BBC	Hong Kong Bank	Prudential
Black & Decker	Hong Kong Telecom	Rank Organisation
BOC Group	IATA	Rank Xerox
British Airways	IBM	Reckitt & Colman
British Rail	ICI	RJR Nabisco
Cable & Wireless	ICL	Rohm & Haas
Cargill	KLM	Royal Bank of Canada
CarnaudMetalbox	KPMG	Sealand
Carrier	Lloyds Bank	Shell
Case IH	London Underground	SKF
Citibank	Massey Ferguson	Smithkline Beecham
Colgate Palmolive	Mercury Communications	Sony
Coopers & Lybrand	Midland Bank	Sun Microsystems
DHL	MSAS Cargo	Tenneco
Dow Chemical	Nationwide Building Society	Texas Instruments
Eagle Star	Nokia	3M
European Passenger Services	Norsk Hydro	TNT
Fluor	Northern Telecom	Unilever
Forte		

Clearly in its self-selection and scope this database is different from many of the others you have considered during this symposium. Further, the content of the surveys themselves is driven by pragmatic priorities designed to help the organisations themselves gain an understanding of their employees views in order to improve the way they are run.

The rationale for such surveys has evolved alongside developments in organisational thinking. Historically, from the 'troop morale' studies in the Second World War through to the 1980's, the bulk of the survey work tended to consist of 'climate studies' designed to assess and explain the nature of employee morale and motivation. With the advent of a more strategic role for human resources managers and a recognition that the "soft" information provided by employees could be accurately measured, monitored and used as the basis for target setting, the role of the employee survey has changed, (Kynaston Reeves & Harper, 1981, Walters, 1990).

**WHY DO COMPANIES SURVEY EMPLOYEES? (I)
HISTORICALLY**

- **TO MEASURE EMPLOYEE MORALE**
- **TO ASSESS QUALITY OF WORKING LIFE**
- **TO ACT AS A BAROMETER OF INCIPIENT I.R. PROBLEMS**
- **AS A "TOP-DOWN" APPROACH**
- **AS AN INTERNAL PR APPROACH**

**WHY DO COMPANIES SURVEY EMPLOYEES? (II)
CURRENTLY**

I. MEASUREMENT

- **OBTAINING SPECIFIC INFORMATION, INTEGRATED
WITH BUSINESS OBJECTIVES**
- **ASSESSING PROGRESS ACHIEVED OVER TIME**
- **BENCHMARKING RESULTS IN RELATION TO
NATIONAL STANDARDS AND "BEST IN CLASS"
PERFORMANCE**

II. EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT

TO PROVIDE A TOOL FOR ORGANISATION CHANGE BY INVOLVING EMPLOYEES, THEREBY:

- CREATING BOTTOM-UP ENERGY FOR THE CHANGE PROCESS
- HELPING ESTABLISH AN EMPOWEREMENT CULTURE WHERE RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHANGE IS SHARED AT ALL LEVELS
- SUPPORTING OTHER INITIATIVES, (e.g. TQ)

Further, flatter, less hierarchical organisational structures, coupled with increased emphasis on employee empowerment and involvement in decision making has made the survey instrument and the follow-up action it engenders all the more important for organisations seeking to demonstrate that the notion that "employees truly are their greatest asset" is not mere cliché.

Just as the survey activity has grown, so its content has been adapted to suit current circumstances. A number of what we could call "traditional climate indicators" such as working relationships, supervisory and management practices, pay and benefits, job satisfaction, training and communications, remain at the core of most organisational surveys undertaken. But new issues such as employee involvement, diversity, quality and customer focus are playing an increasing role as organisations seek feedback and plan corrective action to improve internal operating efficiency or improve customer satisfaction.

The challenge of such surveys is in the accurate interpretation of results. Variations in typical score across topic and, for international studies, variations in score across cultures, render interpretation and eventual action planning hazardous at best and meaningless at worst. For this reason, from an early stage in its existence, ISR sought to establish national comparative databases which would provide accurate and valid benchmarks against which to evaluate an organisation's survey results. These "national norms", updated annually, have now been established for some 28 countries as follows:

ISR NATIONAL NORMS

	(N)
AUSTRALIA	63,050
AUSTRIA*	
BELGIUM	13,520
BRAZIL	28,740
CANADA	18,692
DENMARK	1,550
FINLAND	1,277
FRANCE	31,786
GERMANY	29,430
GREECE*	
HONG KONG	6,348
HUNGARY*	
IRELAND*	
ITALY	13,494
JAPAN	5,896
MALAYSIA	5,241
MEXICO	5,561
NETHERLANDS	19,412
NORWAY	1,976
PORTUGAL*	
SINGAPORE	3,744
SOUTH AFRICA	17,392
SPAIN	15,490
SWEDEN	1,984
SWITZERLAND	10,430
TAIWAN	3,165
UK	82,991
USA	148,754

* FROM Q1 1995

COMPOSITION OF NATIONAL NORMS

- DATABASE CREATED FROM NATIONAL REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE OF EMPLOYEES
- SUPPLEMENTED BY RESULTS FROM ISR SURVEYS
- WEIGHTED ACCORDING TO COMPANY SIZE AND REGENCY OF SURVEY

The methodology for establishing these national norms can be described as follows:

Within the questionnaires developed for individual organisations, then, there is a core of norm statements enabling results to be compared to an average for other organisations. The amount of norm coverage varies but typically would encompass approximately two thirds of items included in the questionnaire. For the purposes of analysis, these are then grouped into the following categories:

QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

ISR HAS A NORMATIVE DATABASE OF APPROXIMATELY TWO HUNDRED ITEMS USED IN CORE QUESTIONNAIRES. THESE ARE CLASSIFIED UNDER THE FOLLOWING HEADINGS:

1. WORK ORGANISATION
2. ORGANISATIONAL EFFICIENCY
3. MANAGEMENT
4. SUPERVISION
5. WORKING RELATIONSHIPS
6. COMMUNICATIONS
7. JOB TRAINING AND INFORMATION
8. PERFORMANCE ORIENTATION
9. CAREER DEVELOPMENT
10. PAY
11. BENEFITS

QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

- 12. WORKING CONDITIONS
- 13. JOB SECURITY
- 14. PERSONNEL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES
- 15. JOB SATISFACTION
- 16. COMPANY IMAGE
- 17. COMPANY IDENTIFICATION
- 18. ORGANISATION CHANGE
- 19. QUALITY
- 20. EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT
- 21. CUSTOMER SATISFACTION
- 22. ORGANISATIONAL VALUES
- 23. REACTION TO THE SURVEY

The category and item breakdown is driven primarily by pragmatic organisational requirements for information relating to discrete topics, amenable to target setting and improvement plans. That said, multi-variate analyses are frequently used to improve instrument design and to explore causal structure.

Further, we are in a privileged position in being able to study the nature and evolution of work attitudes and values cross-nationally, both for the norm database as a whole, and for individual companies. By way of illustration, we shall first consider the pattern of variation at norm level across several key categories and then amplify these findings with reference to the literature. At this stage this paper is limited to observations and general findings generated from the results of surveys conducted in these organisations. It is meant to be a starting point for discussion and investigation rather than a definitive statement.

While the surveys themselves have been conducted, as far as possible, with consideration to methodological issues (including ensuring linguistic, conceptual, functional and metric equivalence, cf. Lonner, 1979), it must be recognised that the primary reason for data collection was to obtain relevant information for the sponsoring organisation. This means that topics and data collection methods have sometimes been out of our control. The lack of control however is compensated for by the general and extensive subject base.

Survey Structure

The typical survey process, as conducted by ISR, includes identifying areas of concern and importance for the sponsoring organisation. This is done through a combination of individual and group interviews. The results of this stage are used to design a survey instrument that contains the following elements:

Core items - items that are included as part of normative data bases; Company Specific items - items selected from our item pool, which are of interest/concern for the organisation, but are not typically included in our normative data bases; and Company

Tailored items - items that are designed specifically for the sponsoring organisation.

Surveys have been conducted in the major languages of the countries concerned, and have items which have been translated with respect to achieving not only linguistic equivalence, but also conceptual and functional equivalence. While not all of these items are asked in all surveys, a core set of items is consistently used to ensure availability of benchmark scores for a number of countries and certain industries.

In addition to trying to ensure that items are translated appropriately, we try to ensure that the scaling or response method we use reduces the chance of cultural bias. Although the response scales vary according to the nature of the question, the typical scale includes five possible responses - 'Agree, Tend to Agree, '?', Tend to Disagree and Disagree. The rationale behind this scale is as follows:

The absence of strongly word statements (i.e. "Strongly Agree" or "Strongly Disagree") reduces the likelihood of employees from cultures which have a tendency to not express strong opinions (negative or otherwise) to simply mark a middle response (cf. Hui & Triandis, 1989). Although, respondents are informed that the mid-point reflects a "Not Applicable/No Opinion/Don't Know" possibility, by using a "?", rather than words, the mid-point marking tendency is further reduced.

In analysing the results, the favourable score is created by combining both the "Agree" and "Tend to Agree" responses (or depending on which is the favourable response on some items, the "Disagree" and "Tend to Disagree" responses). Further, the pattern of responses (including the percentage of respondents who mark the "?" option, is taken into account in any interpretation of the data. This is especially important for some countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

Some Findings and Discussion

In the past, a series of factor analyses have been conducted with our item base to combine similar items together. Such analyses have revealed about 20 different

categories. In this paper we will concentrate on five of these categories - management, supervision, working relationships, employee involvement and communication. These categories have tended to be robust in a number of factor analyses. Further, they are topics that have been of wide interest to people in the organisational and work research fields. Table 9 shows each of the categories and their respective items.

Table 9.

Category 1: Management

- Company Management provides a clear sense of direction for my company. (A/TA)
- I have confidence in the decisions made by senior management of my company. (A/TA)
- The decisions my company management make concerning employees are usually fair. (A/TA)
- Company management is interested in the well-being of their employees. (A/TA)
- Management of my company generally understands the problems we face in our jobs. (A/TA)
- I often don't believe what management of my company says. (D/TD)
- In my judgement, the following are well managed: (A/TA)
 - a. My department
 - b. The company as a whole

Category 2: Supervision

- My supervisor understands the technical aspects of my work. (A/TA)
- I have confidence in the decisions made by my supervisor. (A/TA)
- My supervisor communicates effectively. (A/TA)
- My supervisor usually makes clear-cut decisions. (A/TA)
- My supervisor does a good job of building teamwork. (A/TA)
- My supervisor shows favouritism to some employees in my department. (D/TD)
- My supervisor is usually receptive to suggestions for change from employees. (A/TA)
- My supervisor seldom gives me recognition for work well done. (D/TD)

Category 3: Working relationships

- The people I work with usually get along well together. (A/TA)
- There is usually good cooperation between employees in my department and other departments. (A/TA)
- Employees are treated with respect here, regardless of their job. (A/TA)
- How satisfied are you that you are treated with fairness and respect. (VS/S)

Category 4: Empowerment

- I have sufficient authority to do my job well. (A/TA)
- I am satisfied with my involvement in decisions that affect my work. (A/TA)
- My company has established a climate where people can challenge our traditional ways of doing things. (A/TA)
- My immediate boss involves me in: (A/TA)
 - a. Planning the work of my group
 - b. Solving problems related to our work
 - c. Making decisions that affect our work
- How satisfied are you with the opportunity you have to input your ideas? (VS/S)

Category 5: Communications

- My company does an excellent job of keeping us informed about matters affecting us. (A/TA)
- I usually hear about important company matters first through rumours. (D/TD)
- We receive adequate information on company personnel policies and practices. (A/TA)
- Little effort is made to get the opinions and thinking of employees in my company. (D/TD)
- Most of the time it is safe to speak up in my company. (A/TA)
- If I were dissatisfied with my immediate boss's decision on an important matter, I would feel free to go to someone higher in authority. (A/TA)

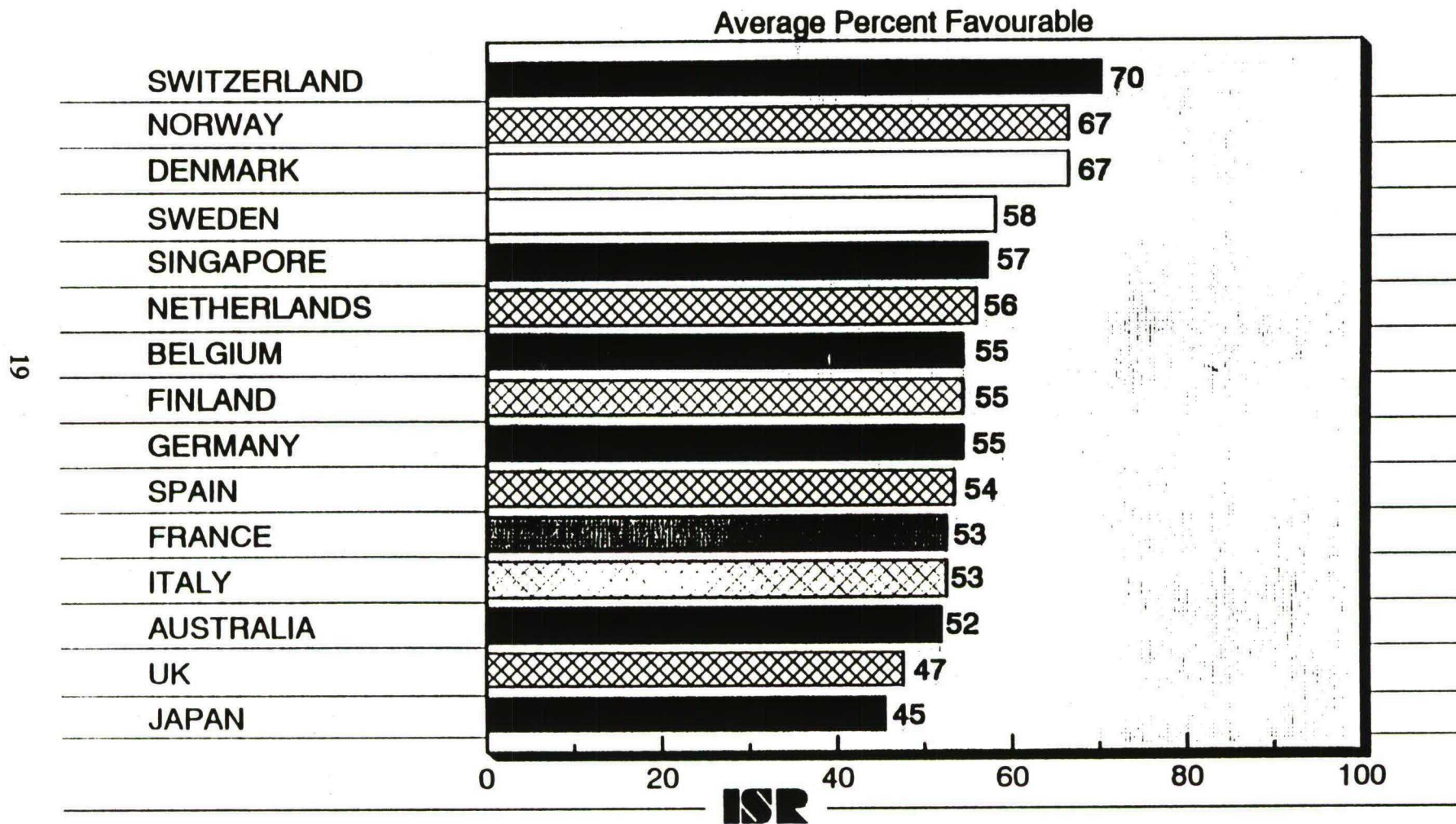
While we have limited the discussion of results to 12 European countries for which we have data, we have included three Asian-Pacific countries (Australia, Japan and Singapore) to give some idea of how significantly different cultures also compare on the same items and categories.

Management: Table 10 shows the total percent favourable score for the management category for each of the fifteen countries in descending order. The items which seem to have particular high variability in the percent favourable scores include:

- 'Company management is interested in the well-being of employees'
- 'Management generally understands the problems we face on our jobs'
- 'I often don't believe what management says'
- 'Company management provides a clear sense of direction'
- 'Management is generally respected by employees'.

TABLE 10

COUNTRY VARIATIONS IN ATTITUDES TOWARDS MANAGEMENT



On these items, employees from both the UK and Japan consistently report low favourable scores, while employees from Switzerland and the Scandinavian countries report high scores. The range of difference between these two groups is about 20 percent of higher. For example, Denmark, Switzerland and Norway are 30, 22 and 21 percentage points higher than the UK on the item 'company management is interested in the well-being of employees'.

Supervision: Table 11 shows the total percent favourable for each of the fifteen countries for the supervision category in descending order. Again, employees from Switzerland and the north European countries score highest, with employees from Singapore scoring lowest. The items which seem to have particular high ranges in favourable scores include:

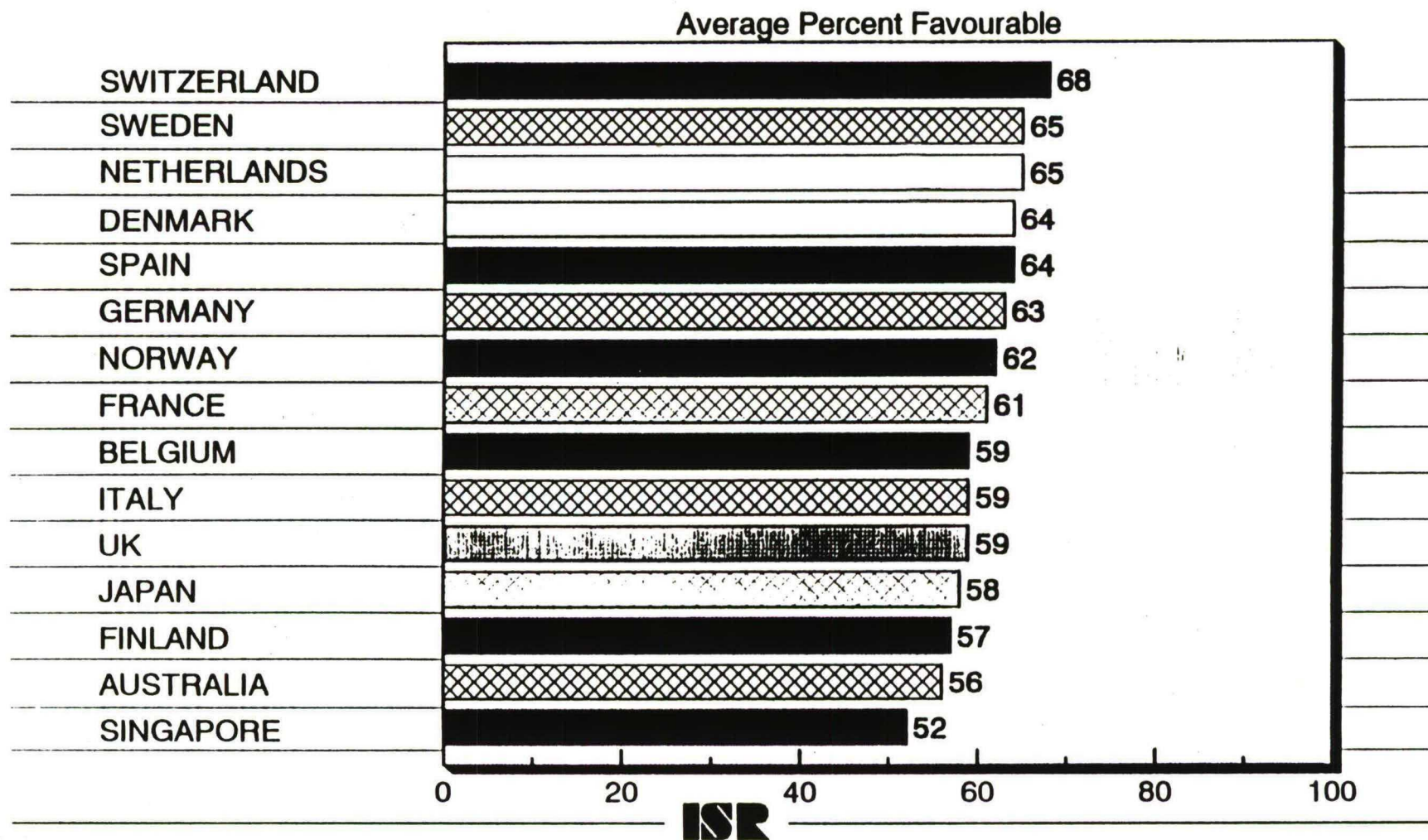
'My supervisor shows favouritism to some employees in my department'

'My supervisor makes clear-cut decisions'

'My supervisor does a good job building teamwork'

TABLE 11

COUNTRY VARIATIONS IN ATTITUDES TOWARDS SUPERVISION



For over one third of employees from Finland, Belgium, and Italy, favouritism seems to be of concern (37%, 36% and 36% respectively). For Japanese, Swiss, and Dutch employees, however, the issue is not as great a concern (only 14%, 19% and 19% respectively agreeing with the statement that their supervisor shows favouritism to some employees in their department).

British, Japanese and Belgium employees scored lowest their supervisors score lowest on making 'clear-cut' decisions, while the Swiss score highest.

The lowest favourable score for a supervisor building teamwork was reported by Japanese employees (47% favourable). This was a surprising score considering that team work, especially within a work unit, is regarded highly in Japan. The results suggests that perhaps, Japanese expectations for performance on certain issues may well be higher than other countries. This is discussed below. Danish, Spanish, Swedish and Swiss employees scored the highest favourable scores on this item (65%, 65%, 64% and 64% respectively).

Working Relationships: Table 12 shows the total percent favourable for each of the fifteen countries for working relationships in descending order. The Scandinavian countries and Switzerland score highest, with Japan scoring lowest. The items which seem to have particular high ranges in favourable scores include:

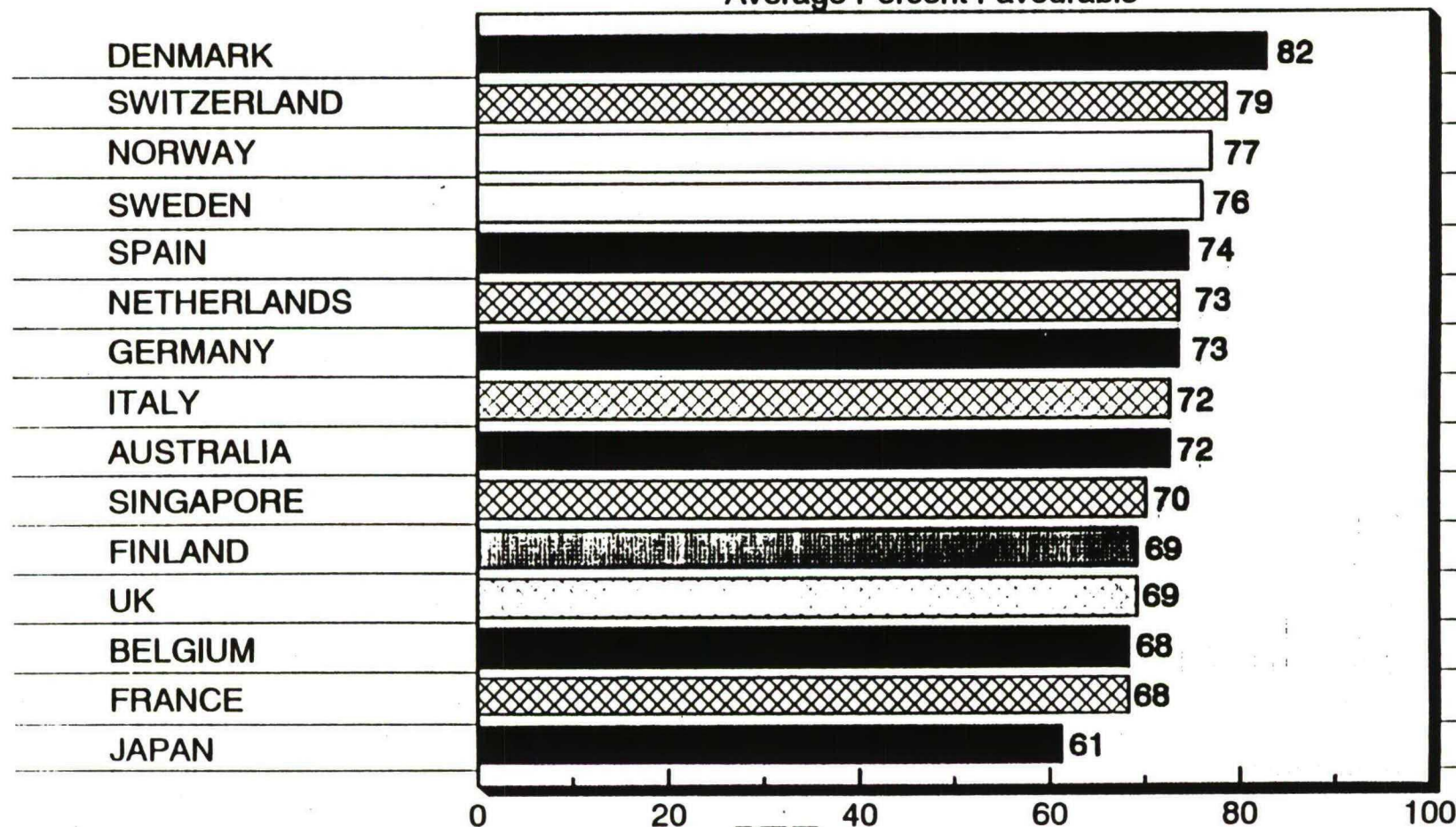
'Employees are treated with respect here, regardless of their job'

'There is good co-operation between my department and other departments'

TABLE 12

COUNTRY VARIATIONS IN ATTITUDES TOWARDS WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

Average Percent Favourable



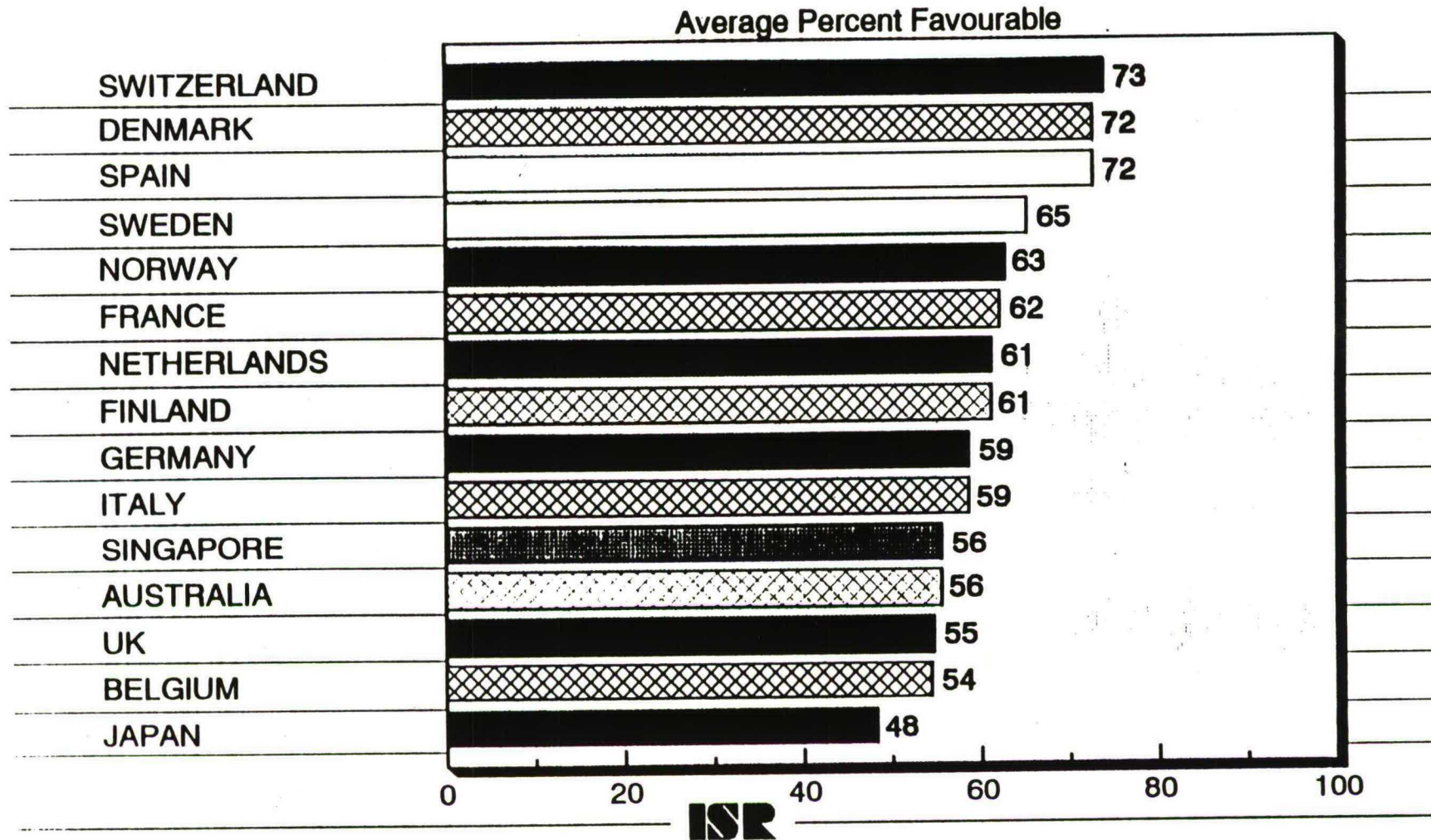
British employees scored lowest on the respect item, with only 49% agreeing with the statement that 'employees are treated with respect here, regardless of their job'. Swiss and Italian employees scored high with 77% and 75% favourable, respectively.

Employee Involvement: Table 13 shows the total percent favourable for each of the fifteen countries for the employee involvement category in descending order. Switzerland, the north European countries and Spain score highest, with Japan scoring lowest. The items which seem to have particular high ranges in favourable scores include:

'I am satisfied with my involvement in decisions that affect my work'

TABLE 13

COUNTRY VARIATIONS IN ATTITUDES TOWARDS EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT



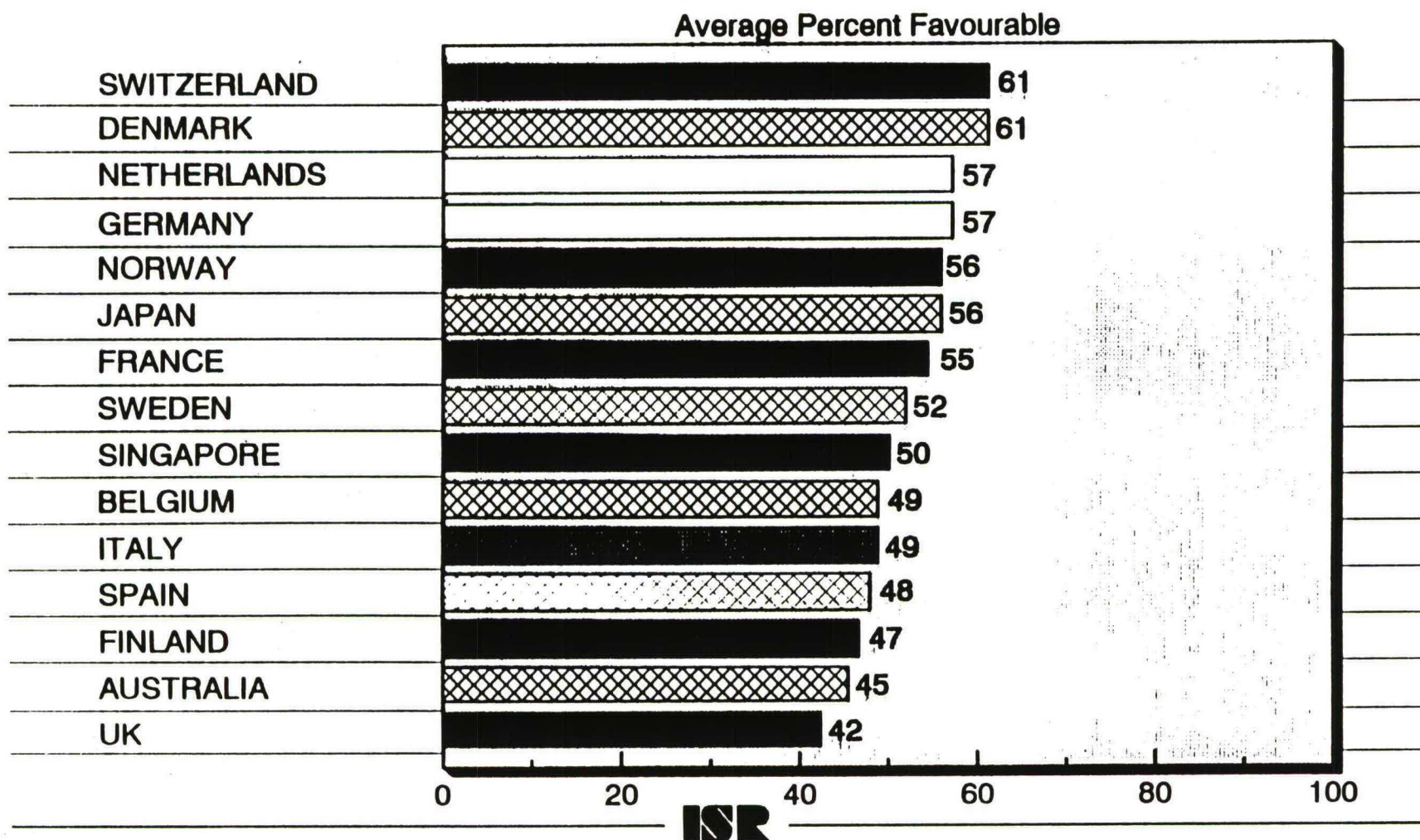
Communication: Finally, Table 14 shows the total percent favourable for each of the fifteen countries for communication in descending order. Again, Switzerland and the north European countries score highest, with UK scoring lowest. The items which seem to have particular high ranges in favourable scores include:

'We usually hear about important matters first through rumours'

'Most of the time it is safe to speak up in this company'

TABLE 14

COUNTRY VARIATIONS IN ATTITUDES TOWARDS COMMUNICATION



Seventy-nine percent of British employees reported hearing 'about important matters first through rumours', followed by Belgium employees on 71%. Danish, Swiss, Norwegian and Japanese employees reported lower scores on this item (41%, 42%, 46% and 46% respectively).

Likewise, British employees were less likely to feel it safe to speak up in their company (42% favourable). This score is very much less than all the other countries. Danish, followed by Norwegian and Swiss employees reported the most favourable scores for this item (77%, 67% and 67% respectively).

The "?" Response Option

As mentioned earlier, in all the surveys conducted, one of the response options is a "?" or 'Not Applicable/No Opinion/Don't Know' answer. While in itself it is of no major interest, it still has interest in providing a general picture of country differences. When we look at the data, we can see that there is a tendency for those who do indicate more favourable attitudes on the different items, to also be less likely to choose the 'Not applicable/No opinion' response option. Interestingly, Denmark has consistently fewer people than any other country who mark this option - in most cases it is 10% or lower.

Generally,

There is a common assumption made by many managers that there is a definable set of management skills that exist regardless of cultural, national and organisational boundaries (Boyacigiller & Adler, 1991). However, several researchers have questioned whether, all managers actually face situations that are identical or which require similar skill bases (Peterson, Smith, Bond & Misumi, 1990). Research has suggested that, while managers may have a similar skill base, the types of skills, as well as the resources upon which they rely, can vary across cultures (Hofstede, 1984; Peterson, Smith, et. al., 1994). It certainly appears from the results reported here that while it is true that managers around the world do share a similar skill repertoire, the attitudes held by both themselves and their subordinates to issues related to management practices and inter-employee relations do vary as a function of country.

As one will notice from the results, there is a general pattern of consistency. Switzerland and the north European countries (especially Scandinavia, except for Finland) tend to be more positive on each of the categories - management, supervision, working relationships, employee involvement and communication. In terms of the European countries the UK tends to consistently score low, as do Australia and Japan.

The work by Hofstede (1984, 1991) has been the most widely adopted starting point for research dealing with management and organisational culture in the last 15 years. In terms of trying to understand the results observed in our data, simple correlation coefficients were calculated between the five categories and Hofstede's (1984) cultural dimensions of individualism, uncertainty avoidance and power distance (see Table 15). The results showed the following:

CORRELATIONS BETWEEN WORK VALUES (r's)

	Power Distance	Uncertainty Avoidance	Individualism
Working Relationships	-.62*	-.48*	.35
Supervision	-.49*	-.37	.24
Management	-.43	-.19	.07
Employee Involvement	-.39	-.01	.00
Communication	-.25	.10	-.12

* p < .05 (two-tailed)

There seems to be little significant correlation between the five work attitude categories and individualism.

A high favourable score for working relationships however does seem to correlate negatively with uncertainty avoidance.

Further, power distance does have a negative relationship with all five categories and is significant for both working relationships and supervision.

In other words, in countries where uncertainty avoidance is high (e.g. Japan, France and Belgium), employees are likely to report lower favourable scores towards working relationships. Likewise, in countries where power distance is low (e.g. Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Switzerland), employees are likely to report more favourable attitudes towards working relationships and supervision.

In addition to Hofstede's dimensions, a number of other explanations can help to explain the results:

Quality of Life Variations

Surveys of Values and Quality of Life using indicators of satisfaction reveal a variation in cross-national scores which appears to broadly correspond to the order described above (cf Harding & Philips, 1986, Inglehart, 1990: Ashford & Timms, 1992). There is some scope for considering that perceived quality of life generally, and not just in the workplace, underpins to some extent the cross-national pattern observed.

At first glance the results for Japanese employees are surprising. Intuitively one would expect them to be higher on working relationships, supervision, and employee involvement. However, the results can be explained in terms of a variety of factors:

For the first time, the idea of life employment was being seriously threatened and de-emphasised. Many people were blaming leaders (both political and management) for Japan's economic problems.

Japanese employees tend to be less overtly favourable in their responses than employees from other countries, thereby reducing overall scores. Similarly it could be argued that because of cultural values of modesty and not 'standing out' from others, Japanese employees are less likely to indicate extremes of opinions (cf. Zax & Takahashi, 1967).

A third option that has yet to be studied systematically is the possible differences in perceptions and attitudes of Japanese workers who work for non-Japanese companies in Japan versus Japanese companies. Often non-Japanese companies have different organisational structures and strategies and human resource policies and procedures. In comparisons with family and friends outside the work place, employees working for non-Japanese companies may become more negative simply because of the differences from what they perceive happening around them. Similarly, Japanese who go to work for non-Japanese companies may have much higher expectations in relation to equal opportunity, experiences and career advancement/development. When exposed to the realities of the work environment, these expectations are not met, and therefore bring about greater negative attitudes.

Further work is needed to tease out the real reasons for the low scores for Japan.

The low scores for both Australian and the UK could reflect the economic conditions of both countries, especially Australia.

So what and where do we go from here?

Our observations suggest two things:

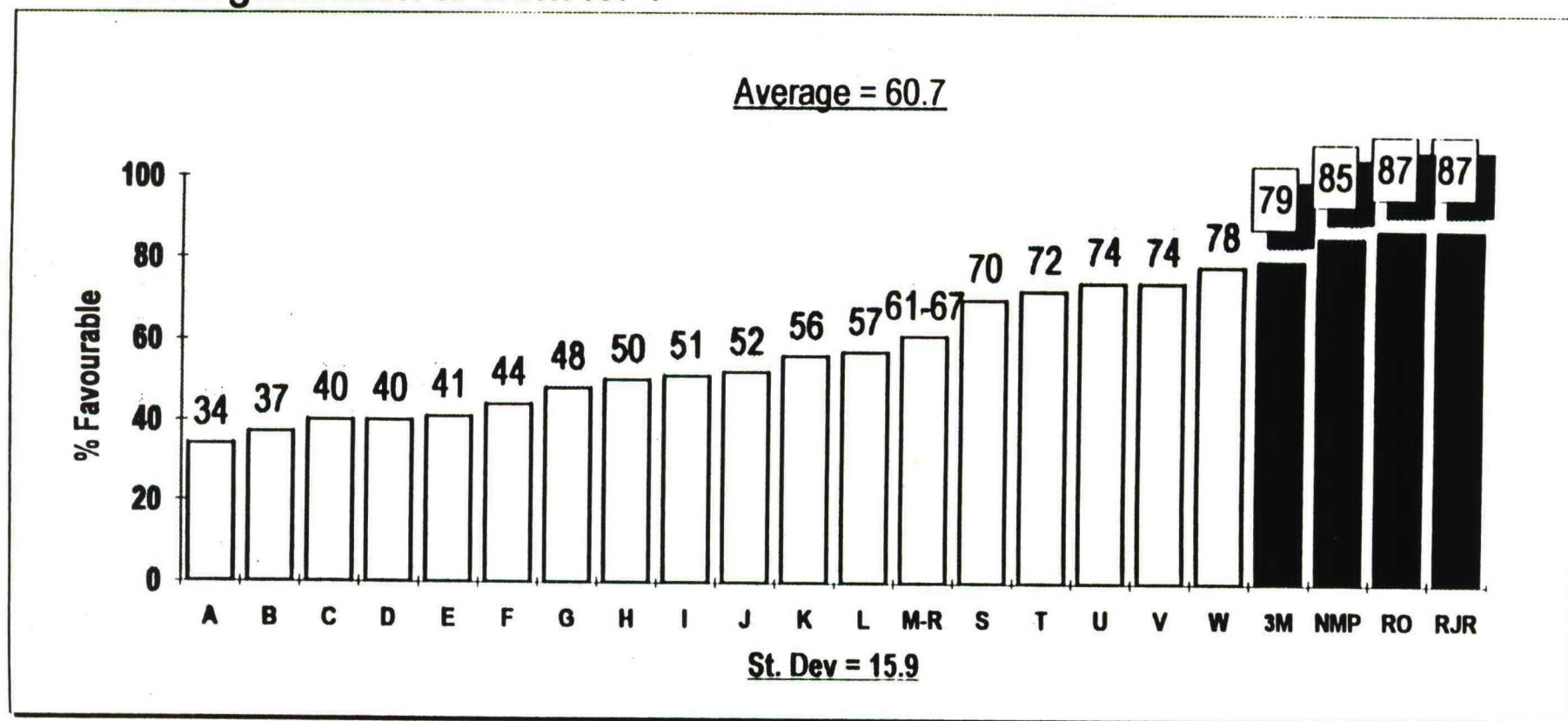
First, in terms of value for understanding organisation climate and helping to direct human resource policy and organisational change and development, employee surveys need to take into account local attitudes and context. High and low scores may be related to cultural and contextual factors rather than any objective base line. Thus Swiss employees may rate things higher than most employees from other countries, while Japanese employees may rate the same topics lower. Accurate comparisons can only be made with confidence when employees from one culture are compared with employees of the same culture.

In terms of application, a further elaboration of the normative approach of particular interest to organisations pursuing Total Quality Management has been the creation of a benchmark group known as the "BEST in Europe" Group. Created in 1992 by Rank Xerox and ISR together with some 11 other European companies committed to regular employee surveys (usually annual or bi-annual), this group compares their results not only to national averages, but also to best performance amongst themselves. By comparing results directly on identically worded items, organisations can determine how far they are from maximum achieved best performance within a particular domain (see Table 16).

TABLE 16

BEST IN EUROPE : REPORT IV JUNE 1994**RESULTS FOR THE UK****CATEGORY I : Satisfaction and Involvement**

3. Taking everything into account, how satisfied are you with this company as an organisation to work for ?



The objective is not simply measurement, but also to enter into benchmarking practices between organisations from which mutually beneficial learning can be achieved. From the 12 founder companies, membership of the group now exceeds 35 organisations.

Second, in terms of academic and theoretical research, our results suggest the need to look for further explanations for cultural differences in work, and possibly other behaviour. Simply looking at dimensions such as individualism (and collectivism) are not enough to explain the differences that we find. Other factors such as language, history, economics, environment and so on, may also have a role.

As we mentioned at the outset of this presentation. This paper is a presentation of some observations of findings from data collected in an applied setting in a number of different countries. It is clear from this 'quick' glance, that there are real differences, and some of the differences show consistent patterns. Certainly, further investigation is warranted. The next steps for us include:

Determining the nature and structure of items and categories in different countries - are they the same or different?

Identifying whether there are consistent and predictable relationships between variables.

Identifying possible correlates - e.g. personality characteristics, cultural, social and economic factors.

Looking at changes over time - do results vary over time and if so in what way? Are variations related to changes in the environment and context in which data is collected? Do they support the notion of an increase in individualistic values described elsewhere? (Zanders, 1993, Zanders and Harding, in press).

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Stephen Harding

ISR London, Albany House, Petty France, London SW1H 9EE

Mark Radford

ISR Asia Pacific, 350 Orchard Road, 19-01 Shaw House, Singapore 0923

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